

# Reflections on Faith-Based Solidarity and Social Membership: Beyond Religion? The Case of Lebanese Shiite FBOs

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Estella Carpi\*

During the July 2006 postwar period in Beirut's southern suburbs (Dahiye), which were destroyed by the Israeli air force in its effort to annihilate the Lebanese Shiite party Hezbollah, the Islamic Shi'a philanthropic sphere has been growing. It has pioneered the postwar reconstruction process and local relief provision, while diversely defining itself in relation to its secular and faith-based counterparts. This paper examines the extent to which religious providers develop solidarity with or antagonism towards provider members of the same community in times of crisis. Indeed, intra-community solidarity among different aid providers tends to be taken for granted. Problematizing this common belief is particularly important for defining the ways in which social solidarity either develops or contracts across faith-based communities during conflict-induced displacement. In this context, aid provision and local accountability remain fundamental litmus papers. Drawing on in-depth, semi-structured interviews conducted in Dahiye from 2011 to 2013 with Lebanese Shiite faith-based organizations and private initiatives, a secular local organization, and their respective beneficiaries, this paper advances reflections on how social membership and acts of solidarity and charity interact within the Lebanese philanthropic scenario.

Keywords: Lebanon, Shiite, Muslim, Solidarity, Hezbollah, Israel



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\* Estella Carpi is a Postdoctoral Research Associate at the Development Planning Unit (University College London) and Humanitarian Affairs Advisor at Save the Children-UK.

## ***Introduction***

During the July 2006 postwar period in Beirut's southern suburbs (Dahiye) – which saw the Pyrrhic victory of the major Lebanese Shiite party Hezbollah over Israel - the Islamic Shi'a philanthropic sphere has grown. It has pioneered the reconstruction process and local relief provision, while diversely defining itself in relation to its secular and faith-based counterparts. This paper examines the extent to which religious providers develop relationships of solidarity, collaboration, or antagonism with provider members of the same community in times of crisis. Indeed, intra-community solidarity among different aid providers tends to be taken for granted. Problematizing this matter is particularly relevant to defining the ways in which social solidarity – defined as what holds society together, on the basis of shared values and responsibilities - in times of conflict-induced displacement either develops or contracts across faith-based communities. In this context, aid provision and local accountability remain fundamental litmus papers. The paper draws on the author's doctoral dissertation,<sup>1</sup> which investigated Northern-led and Southern-led responses to internal displacement during the July 2006 war between Israel and Lebanon. In particular, the author will draw on the in-depth, semi-structured interviews conducted between 2011 and 2013 at the Musa as-Sadr Foundation headquarters in Tyre; al-Mabarrat Association<sup>2</sup> founded by as-Saiyyd Mohammed Hussein Fadlallah; its sub-branch al-Hadi; and, finally, Jihad al-Binaa, one of Hezbollah's biggest NGOs. Similarly, in-depth interviews and participant observation have been conducted during the same timeframe with Lebanese beneficiaries who have been affected by war and displacement.

I will use the term 'faith-based' to refer to NGOs that explicitly rely on a specific confession in setting out their foundational

1 Carpi, E. (2015) *Adhocratic Humanitarianisms and Ageing Emergencies in Lebanon. From the July 2006 War in Beirut's Southern Suburbs to the Syrian Refugee Influx in the Akkar Villages*. PhD Dissertation. Sydney, University of Sydney.

2 Fadlallah founded al-Mabarrat Association in 1978 to provide a library, education services, services for orphans, a hospital mosque, and a dispensary. Not all these facilities were funded by Iran as often believed (Harb, M. (2010) *Le Hezbollah à Beirut (1985-2005): de la Banlieue à la Ville*. Paris, France: IFPO-Karthala, p. 45); they had been set up with the purpose of enabling people to engage in social activities and actions, on the conceptual basis of employing *al-multazimun* ('committed people'). Fadlallah, known for having issued quite modernistic *fatwas* at al-Hassaneiyyn Mosque in the Beirut suburb of Haret Hreik, also used to hold a phone line where anonymous people could call and ask for consultancy about daily Muslim practices (Harb, *Le Hezbollah à Beirut*, p. 46), pointing to his local accountability.

principles and project implementation, while noting that faith is only one facet of a broader religious identity that contributes to a social order and fits within a specific culture – and that has also been diversely defined as ‘religious welfare’.<sup>3</sup> Nandy instead differentiates between religion as ‘ideology’, a (sub)national identifier of populations protecting socio-economic or political interests, and religion as ‘faith, a way of life, a tradition that is definitely non-monolithic and operationally plural’.<sup>4</sup> Indeed, states prefer to deal with religions as faiths rather than as ideologies.

### *Agents of continual care versus ‘passers-by’ in relief provision?*

Using the classification system proposed by Clarke and Jennings,<sup>5</sup> Dahiye’s FBOs are considered as socio-political in the international arena<sup>6</sup> because of the predominantly Shiite population among their beneficiaries, and therefore reflecting the interests of a particular community. Nonetheless, the FBOs I interviewed promote a political and cultural agenda according to which tolerance and inclusivity towards non-Shiites is a local value. For instance, by founding NGOs, political parties are often willing to provide services to non-politically affiliated individuals with the purpose of gaining new adepts, by relying on a politics of scarcity, that is, reward or denial of benefits to citizens neglected by the state.<sup>7</sup>

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The charity model in Shi’a Islam has evolved over the last decades,<sup>8</sup> although this has often been overlooked: religious actors, unlike the secular, tend to be viewed homogenously and distinctly from other civil society actors working in the same

3 Jawad, R. (2009) ‘Religion and Social Welfare in the Lebanon: treating the Causes or Symptoms of Poverty?’, *Journal of Social Policy*, 38, pp. 141-156.

4 Nandy, A. (2002) *Time Warps: The Insistent Politics of Silent and Evasive Pasts*. London: Hurst and Company, pp. 61-62.

5 Clarke, G. and Jennings, M. (2008) *Development, Civil Society and Faith-Based Organizations. Bridging the Sacred and the Secular*. London: Palgrave Macmillan.

6 Ajami, F. (1986) *The Vanished Imam. Musa al-Sadr and the Shi’a of Lebanon*. New York: Cornell University Press.

7 Cammett, M.C. (2011) ‘Partisan Activism and Access to Welfare in Lebanon’, *St. Comp. Int. Dev.*, 46, pp. 70-97.

8 Jawad, ‘Religion and Social Welfare in the Lebanon’.

communities in which they are embedded.<sup>9</sup> However, field visits conducted from 2011 to 2013<sup>10</sup> have suggested that local FBOs in Lebanon represent themselves as acting on the basis of cultural and moral principles, which vary to a considerable measure; yet they all intend to reduce dependence on external aid and financial support. Likewise, beneficiary residents affirmed they did not prefer local community provided services in all cases. Moreover, they did not prefer local FBOs *because* their actions are compatible with Muslim values, unlike secular NGOs.<sup>11</sup> This raises important questions regarding the effectiveness - and the taken-for-granted definition - of intra-community solidarity purposes. Furthermore, the beneficiaries interviewed in Dahiye expressed mistrust of and disaffection towards local religious international aid providers as much as secular ones. In this regard, it is crucial to further explore the process that has seen the assimilation of the religious factor into local politics, eliminating the potential for solidarity within a community-based management of society.

### ***Claiming diversity within the Shi'a (humanitarian?) sphere in Lebanon***

In the humanitarian discourse, the role of secular and international aid providers during emergency crises is often foregrounded at the expenses of religious providers. This is largely due to the religious character of their philanthropic goals - and thus their alleged unsuitability for 'neutral' aid provision -

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and their traditional endeavor towards social and divine justice. Even so, religious and cultural communities whose members care and provide for one another are said to be more likely to survive than those where this does not happen. In the case of Lebanon, local faith-based organizations (FBOs) have successfully addressed people's needs in times of war. Even though a glance at the history of aid provision has shown how people's disaffection is

9 McDuire-Ra, D. and Rees, J. A. (2010) 'Religious Actors, Civil Society and the Development Agenda: the Dynamics of Inclusion and Exclusion', p. 21.

10 Carpi, *Adhocratic Humanitarianisms and Ageing Emergencies in Lebanon*.

11 This has also been observed by some social workers working for FBOs in Akkar, as a way of 'protecting the village from western ideologies', as also the director of Waqf Taiba, Saudi NGO, affirmed. Interview by the author in Halba, Akkar. 14 December 2012.

likely to be directed towards secular as well as religious actors,<sup>12</sup> local FBOs' fine-grained knowledge of local living conditions, and of context-specific political and social tendencies, remains undeniable.

I will first articulate the relationships among different Shiite FBOs in an attempt to illuminate their differently nuanced politics of aid. Secondly, I will show how the continuous nature of their intervention in crisis-stricken contexts and their everyday contribution to preserving a sense of normalcy in chronically unstable settings have positively defined local FBOs *vis-à-vis* international humanitarian agencies. Indeed, the latter have been depicted in Lebanese media<sup>13</sup> as '*aber sabil*, an opportunistic 'passer-by' in war and post-war scenarios providing standardized aid packages to war victims to boost their own moral standing.

Grand Ayatollah Mohammed Hussein Fadlallah, Imam Musa as-Sadr, and Sayyid Hasan Nasrallah, leading the Lebanese political party Hezbollah, are known as the main Islamic Shi'a spiritual forces and charity providers in Lebanon. The fact that the relationships between the three have often been understood as conflicted reflects the nuanced character of the ideologies of their respective service provision. In spite of the divergences between the two key Shiite figures,<sup>14</sup> Fadlallah and Sadr, they both represent the 'emerging breed of Shiite revivalists in Lebanon'<sup>15</sup>. The former was a good connection to Iran-led Shiite transnationalism, and the latter historically provided a Lebanese component of Shiite political Islam. All of Hezbollah's FBOs, which have been able to weave a strong network of assistance and solidarity along with local citizens across Lebanese history, are instead Iran-born, mainly based in Beirut's southern suburbs.<sup>16</sup>

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12 Carpi, *Adhocratic Humanitarianisms and Ageing Emergencies in Lebanon*.

13 From the *Al-Akhbar* newspaper archive, September 14, 2006.

14 Ajami, *The Vanished Imam*.

15 Gleis, L. J. and Berti, B. (2012) *Hezbollah and Hamas: A Comparative Study*. Baltimore (MD): JHU Press.

16 *Al-Jarih* for the war wounded; *ash-Shahid* for the families of the war victims; *al-Imdad* for local development and social welfare; *al-Qard al-Hasan* for provision of microcredit to local families; *al-Ha'iyah as-Sahhiya al-Islamiyya* for health assistance and protection.

to what officially binds these figures in the public sphere.<sup>17</sup> Notwithstanding, Geneva-based humanitarian aid providers working in the Hezbollah-led areas of Lebanon have largely been acting as a donor and a technocrat during the latest crises.<sup>18</sup>

By employing the Arabic term *insaniyya* – translatable both as ‘humanism’ and ‘humanitarianism’ (respectively the *focus on* human beings and *providing care because* the beneficiaries are human beings) – humanitarian aid provision to local war-affected people and longstanding regional refugees is being reshaped through the Shi‘a cosmology of martyrdom and the struggle against injustice, which is primarily symbolized by the battle at Kerbala in Iraq (680 AD). For the Islamic Shi‘a, Kerbala is in fact a historically recurrent event, which reminds people of the eternal importance of the revolutionary spirit against oppression. This principle also constitutes the bedrock of the Shi‘a social mobilization in Lebanon (*ta‘b‘iya*).<sup>19</sup>

Charity becomes correlated with a long-term project of social justice, as well as with an empathic response to immediate needs, driven by continual benevolent action. Ideals of justice, more specifically, call for the transformation of structures that foster social injustice and indignity. Likewise, public activism and social engagement are the ways in which religious people strive on a daily basis to continue to live the Ashura ceremony – the commemoration of the Imam Hussein’s martyrdom.<sup>20</sup>

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Going beyond the Hezbollah-monopolized narrative of the Islamic Resistance against Israeli aggressions,<sup>21</sup> FBOs’ humanitarian practices, which increasingly integrate the local social *ethos*, need to be implemented in response to any injustice, including poverty and lack of education. In this framework, volunteering and human employment contribute

17 Such political orientations, in fact, caused an attempt of assassination of the Shi‘a cleric on March 8, 1985 in Bi‘r al-‘Abed (Dahiye), conducted by the C.I.A in the framework of the American ‘preemption’ counter-terror program. The exploded car bomb caused 80 casualties and 200 wounded.

18 Carpi, *Adhocratic Humanitarianisms and Ageing Emergencies in Lebanon*.

19 Saad, A. (1996) *An Analysis of the Factors conducive to the Group Cohesion and Political Mobilization of the Lebanese Shiites*. MA Thesis, Beirut, Lebanon: American University of Beirut.

20 Deeb, L. (2009) ‘Emulating and/or embodying the ideal. The gendering of temporal frameworks and Islamic role models in Shi‘a Lebanon’, *American Ethnologist*, 36 (2), p. 247.

21 Carpi, E. (2013) ‘Islamic Resistance in the Southern Suburbs of Beirut’, *OpenDemocracy*, 17 January. Available at: <https://www.opendemocracy.net/opensecurity/estella-carpi/islamic-resistance-in-southern-suburbs-of-beirut> (Accessed: 19 December 2017).

to the development of the whole Lebanese Shi'a community. Against the backdrop of local disaffection with and suspicion of external interventions, the religious - and more broadly the symbolic - significance of human assistance has enabled aid provision to be more trusted locally. Indeed, such local providers have long been the main providers of assistance to the victims of cyclic displacement in southern Lebanon and Beirut's southern suburbs. The continuity of their support has helped them preserve local accountability while shifting their services from charity to the chronically poor to short-term relief to the war-stricken.

Conversely, according to field interviews with local beneficiaries,<sup>22</sup> when international humanitarian organizations intervened in the 2006 war between Lebanon and Israel, their emergency-driven logic has not managed to show moral solidarity and human empathy with the war-stricken. On the one hand, international humanitarian NGOs traditionally tend to view beneficiaries as *victims* of human-made crises, therefore as morally deserving individuals, and at times, rights-bearers who need to be protected. On the other, Shiite charity services have been able to make local people feel like full political agents and resilient. Although the dominant political narrative of the Lebanese Shi'a majority areas has historically been laden with antipathy towards the central state,<sup>23</sup> local inhabitants have been rhetorically addressed as 'citizens' rather than victims *objects* of charity. Social mindfulness and independence are officially promoted as the key qualities for becoming a complete individual,<sup>24</sup> pointing to the proactive function of human life in Lebanese Shiite ethics and philanthropy.

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Despite of shared claims of local success, the Lebanese FBOs that participated in relief provision during times of emergency also lay claim to domestic diversity. For instance, the charity organizations started by Fadlallah contended<sup>25</sup> that their ideology of action is closer to the secular and international conception of humanitarianism than that of their Shi'a counterparts. Their primary goal is indeed to alleviate a human suffering. Nonetheless, in their capacity as local providers, all of the FBOs interviewed

<sup>22</sup> Carpi, *Adhocratic Humanitarianisms and Ageing Emergencies in Lebanon*.

<sup>23</sup> Harb, *Le Hezbollah à Beirut*.

<sup>24</sup> Interview with Faruq Rizq, al-Mabarrat headquarter, al-Ghobeiry, Beirut, 18 October 2012.

<sup>25</sup> Al-Ghobeiry, October 2011.

stated they all pursue a specific project, which implies the idea of a civilian – rather than merely Islamic – Resistance.<sup>26</sup>

In this regard, the fundraising campaigns and advertising material of Fadlallah's organizations state: 'Our organization was destroyed by Israel. We will continue more committed to doing good'. In the case of the Fadlallah-started al-Mabarrat Association, 'doing good' explicitly means to guide individuals.<sup>27</sup> The moral value of guidance – *irshad* - accompanies local forms of humanitarian services.

Providing and benefiting from social services within the Lebanese Shi'a community is in fact part of their struggle against Israel, which is not approached as 'a war to kill, but a war for the right to exist'.<sup>28</sup>

Providing a more nuanced understanding of community care, Maliha as-Sadr, at the helm of Early Child Intervention Lebanon (ECIL), emphasized in an interview<sup>29</sup> how the aim of *insaniyye* – which, as outlined above, I problematically translate here as 'humanitarianism' - is triggering social empowerment by supporting greater equality in Lebanese society. Overall, according to all of the Shi'a FBOs I interviewed, charity organizations *cannot* and *should not* dismantle themselves. On the contrary, although the lines between relief work and development are increasingly blurred, the official aim of international humanitarian agencies remains withdrawal from the territory of intervention as soon as domestic sustainability is achieved. In a nutshell, social efficiency and mutual care in community settings deal positively with recurrent exposure to war. In the same vein, the manager of the Research and Development Department at the Imam as-Sadr Foundation, described international humanitarian action in Lebanon as generally outcome-oriented rather than process-focused. In this regard, he affirmed: 'NGOs which aim to engender change within society should focus on the process of their action and the encounter with their beneficiaries, rather than assessing material results'.<sup>30</sup>

26 Carpi, 'Islamic Resistance in the Southern Suburbs of Beirut'.

27 See the official website: <http://www.mabarrat.org.lb/>.

28 Abild, E. (2007) Hezbollah. A Contextual Study Focusing on Human Freedom. BA Thesis in Development Studies, University of Oslo.

29 Ouzai, Beirut's southern suburbs, 4 December 2012.

30 Interview with the author. Tyre, 8 October 2012.

Development efforts and relief provision in this context are a successful way of coping with chronic uncertainty. Hope-driven policies – in this case even steeped in religious beliefs - do not merely result in providing people with the dream of a better life while using religion as a mere tool to secure quietism in everyday practices. Hope-driven policies rather allow communities to have a politically and religiously proactive link with the future, where hope, notwithstanding the prevailing geopolitical context, *de facto* evolves from an intimate emotion into conscious and realistic proposition.

***Towards a multifaceted Shiite humanitarianism: Beyond well-bounded community solidarities***

In this framework, how does the diversified ideological identification of Dahiye's residents with their providers, and the diverse 'Shiite way' of managing charity associationism, reinforce the idea of a differentiation between Fadlallah and Hezbollah - nowadays intended as two different spiritual and political forces in the Beirut southern suburbs? Raising this question is not intended to further politicize the interpretative lens that captures aid provision within the Shiite humanitarian sphere, but rather to examine possibilities and challenges for solidarity between intra-community providers, which tends to be taken for granted. Likewise, my intent is not to foster intra-sectarian divisions, but rather to draw upon the Lebanese Shiite case to rethink social membership and solidarity in areas affected by conflict and displacement. I will here limit my inquiry to inter-organizational solidarity, therefore opening up a further avenue of research on forms and expressions of solidarity among beneficiaries of the different FBOs.

Among Shiite organizations, both Fadlallah - considered *marja'iyya*<sup>31</sup> - and Hezbollah have acquired increasing legitimacy from the 1980s onwards, although the two sides were initially at loggerheads.<sup>32</sup> Charity is in fact

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31 A *marja'iyya* is a religious Shiite institution: Hezbollah independently follows the Khomeini doctrine under the *Wilayat al-Faqih*, which represents the fusion between the religious and the political, and leads the Shi'a community till the end of all eras, when the 12<sup>th</sup> hidden *Mahdi* – *sahib az-zaman*, 'Patron of Time' – will come back to liberate the Shi'a from oppression once for all.

32 Vandalistic acts against Fadlallah's properties, in fact, occurred in the southern suburbs of Beirut, prior to the Shiite cleric's good relationship with the Party of God. The latter was accused of having committed such a wrongdoing. Fadlallah was considered an ideologue and the spiritual guide of Hezbollah in his latest years in fact, after dissolving past frictions (Harb, *Le Hezbollah à Beirut*, p. 44).

correlated with justice in Dahiye, as the former is the response to immediate needs driven by benevolent action, and justice more specifically calls for the transformation of structures that incubate injustice and lack of dignity. For the Shiites, Kerbala is a historically recurrent event:<sup>33</sup> ‘In every era there is an oppressor and an oppressed. And this history always repeats itself, throughout all eras. People should always have the spirit of revolution against oppression’.

As such, Shi’a humanitarianism has not merely been a political strategy to turn public compassion into political consent.<sup>34</sup> Rather, it has come to form a constitutive part of social assistance.

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The uncertainty and open nature of the timeline along which the Shiite religious community has developed its own conceptions of life are inherent to the existential approach to Shi’a humanitarianism, both in wartime and in peacetime.<sup>35</sup>

Similarly, volunteerism and employment are seen as contributions to the development of the whole Shi’a community. Working for a welfare organization means bringing Zeinab,<sup>36</sup> a holy figure in Shiite theology, into the present.<sup>37</sup> Thus, the common ethical judgment easily identifiable in academic literature<sup>38</sup> on Islamic organizations completely overlooks the fact that these NGOs do not merely *use* Islamic values and charity for political interests; they simply *are* Islamic. In fact,

33 Deeb, ‘Emulating and/or embodying the ideal’, p. 257.

34 Roy, A. (2008) ‘Civic Governmentality: the Politics of Inclusion in Beirut and Mumbai’, *Anti-pode*, Berkeley, CA: University of California, pp. 7-10.

35 Anthropologist Lara Deeb pointed out how Iranian *mahdism* implies a greater eschatological logic than in Lebanon. The Last Day belief is less mentioned by Lebanese Shi’a and, as a consequence, less representative of local mentality, given that, in the case of Lebanon, such a theology is not a hegemonic state plan, but rather a political party’s strategy or culture. Just one among others. Deeb, ‘Emulating and/or embodying the ideal’.

36 It is worth getting deeper into Zeinab here as a source for inspiration: women activists, however, cannot equate her. The way Lebanese Shi’a women look at this figure is therefore induced by social circumstances, which are different from Iran. This leads to a theoretical betrayal of the Weberian conviction that religion is a key factor in influencing reality. Furthermore, the preaching of Imam Mohammed Fadlallah – called *marji at-taqlid* – widely contributed to the empowerment of women in terms of religious roles: he used to say that women can attain the highest level of jurisprudential training and interpret religious tenets, despite the absence of such a norm in Shi’a jurisprudence (Deeb, ‘Emulating and/or embodying the ideal’, p. 251). Even so, the normative moral womanhood was majorly represented by Fatima, the model of calm, maternalism and patience, in opposition to the westernized women in Iran in 1971, as specified by ‘Ali Shari’ati. In that frame, women were called to actively participate in political life only during moments of crisis, and this implied a more changing gender role for women in daily life, with respect to the more static figure of Hussein, who epitomizes the inspirational model for Shi’a manhood.

37 Deeb, ‘Emulating and/or embodying the ideal’, p. 250.

38 Ajami, *The Vanished Imam*.

interests in humanitarian intervention are perceived less by local inhabitants when talking about local providers that have long since been in Dahiye providing aid, to assist cyclic events causing internal displacement of people.

In fact, the Shiite organizations in Dahiye tend to guarantee their action both in wartime and in peacetime, boasting an increased technical self-confidence, even though they recognize how much more developed longstanding Christian services are for historical reasons.<sup>39</sup> Nonetheless, the local perception of local FBOs was empirically ambivalent. On the one side, they were seen as rarely addressing chronic poverty and local injustice, like the internationals: ‘They often end up feeding the accountability of the political party that supports them, has founded them or promoted them’, as a local Dahiye dweller contended.<sup>40</sup> On the other, while international NGOs tend to view beneficiaries as victims and therefore as morally deserving individuals and rights bearers, Fadlallah and Hezbollah’s services have been able to make people feel like political actors.<sup>41</sup>

A degree of open-mindedness in the desire to make their projects sustainable is a further difference highlighted by Fadlallah-founded al-Mabarrat with respect to Hezbollah’s NGOs. Al-Mabarrat expresses its availability to work with foreign NGOs and universities: Hezbollah criticizes such openness, deeming it mere commodification.<sup>42</sup> For example, the Deputy Mayor of one of Hezbollah’s municipalities,<sup>43</sup> said that in the July war, international donors rarely grasped what the local priorities were:

‘Their main focus has been providing psychological assistance... That was not really the issue. We had apartments totally destroyed, damaged buildings, women

39 Interview with Faruq Rizq, al-Mabarrat headquarter, al-Ghobeiry, Beirut, 18 October 2012.

40 Interview with Mohammed, shop owner, Haret Hreik, 2 February 2012.

41 This also occurs as the provider-recipient relationship is widely based on a social contract or reciprocity in Dahiye. The politicization of services, therefore, merely expresses the already existing moral and social relationships between the two parts. In particular, during Lebanon’s civil war Fadlallah used to speak up for the necessity of creating a ‘human state’ - *dawlat al-insan* - that would provide the resources for people to help themselves and one another. He was known for considering public funds as ownership of the people and for capturing this ethics when he said that he was not looking for ‘followers’ but ‘partners’. It is this specific political logic that allowed the Hezbollah party to foster its politics of inclusion. Silverstein, K. (2007) *Hezbollah’s Strength derives from the Strong Social Fabric that they have woven over the years*. Available at: <http://newsgroups.derkeiler.com/Archive/Soc/soc.culture.iranian/2007-03/msg01663.html> (Accessed: 16 October 2017).

42 Interview with al-Hadi Association (al-Mabarrat’s branch), Tariq al-Matar, Beirut, 29 October 2012.

43 Haret Hreik, 18 January 2012.

needing specific help. So, the problem with cooperating with international providers is that they don't fund and work for the things we really need. The reality is never changed by humanitarian services; but if you want to give something, help with infrastructure and more money for housing and furniture. From outside little money came with this purpose'.

Al-Mabarrat's workers, by contrast, argued that they did not feel marginalized in the international market, viewing themselves as members of the same sector; the Mabarrat staff said they felt more like cooperators in the international aid structure.

Nevertheless, local discontent is sometimes identifiable within the structure of the local FBOs themselves, despite the promising premise. The manager of the Research and Development Department,<sup>44</sup> for example, questioned the path undertaken by all NGOs in Lebanon; in his opinion, 'it is much easier to assess the material results of a project. The change promoted by an NGO comes from the process, more than from the material results of a project'.<sup>45</sup> Therein, the local collaboration with the internationals is sometimes unable to grasp the local processes that have been ignited with specific purposes. The continuation of such collaborations, to his mind, is due to *Realpolitik*: Lebanese NGOs need international visibility, and would die out without such partnerships. As international providers primarily show up in times of emergency,<sup>46</sup> crises are actually key to local NGOs' survival.

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Another difference between the two views on humanitarianism espoused by Hezbollah and the Fadlallah-founded services lies in their approach to the 'outside'. The latter promote their community-crossing vision in Dahiye, arguing for services to be provided for any Lebanese community. Nevertheless, they tend to recognize that few people from Lebanese communities other than Shi'a eventually access their services, owing

to the demographical changes since the time of the NGO's foundation. For instance, the Imam as-Sadr Foundation, which

44 Interview with Mohammed Bassam, Tyre, 8 October 2012.

45 Imam as-Sadr Foundation, Tyre, 8 October 2012.

46 It is interesting to notice in fact that some local development projects fail for cultural reasons, according to the manager of the Research and Development Department (i.e. Lebanese Shiite women trained for entering the hoteling market and unlikely to follow up with the acquired skills). Or, again, foreign models are sometimes not ideal for targeting the local nuances of human vulnerability.

can be associated with Fadlallah's approach - despite their sporadic rivalry - was created in the 1960s, prior to the civil war, and 'used to address anyone in the South, where Christian Maronites, Christian Orthodox and Armenians were far more numerous'.<sup>47</sup>

Hezbollah-led municipalities,<sup>48</sup> by contrast, did not conceal<sup>49</sup> the *de facto* selective character of their services in peacetime –primarily targeting Lebanese Shiites - except for during the July war, when the party became a compensation provider for any community inhabiting Dahiye. Since then, the political party has placed particular emphasis on maintaining this post-confessional profile. In its various communications, it has highlighted the endemic nature of the reconstruction, and the fact that people's return to their own homes represents their own victory, regardless of which community they belong to.<sup>50</sup> This rhetoric has also adopted by secular local providers close to the party.<sup>51</sup> Similarly to other political parties in Lebanon, this points to Hezbollah's desire to promote post-confessional discourses and practices.

### ***Secular versus Islamic Shiite pattern of care in Dahiye's local provision***

A social ethics product of an (allegedly) identical cultural and religious background does not seem to homogenize the politics of care across secular and faith-based segments of service provision within the Dahiye context. In this framework, different to Fadlallah's approach to aid provision, the leader of the Lebanese secular NGO Amel Association talked of the necessity of cultivating responsibility in Lebanon by charging

47 Interview with Mohammed Bassam, Tyre, 8 October 2012. In this respect, it is interesting to notice that communal tensions were more perceived by the interviewed among aid providers than among aid recipients.

48 Dahiye is an originally Christian majority area and Lebanese citizens need to vote in the district where their family resides. This explains the reason why the Mayors of the Municipality tend to be Christian. In Dahiye, Shiite Lebanese Hezbollah members therefore tend to be Deputy Mayors, though upholding the largest *de facto* power within their municipality.

49 Interviews with the municipalities of Haret Hreik and al-Ghobeiry, November 2011.

50 The return has often been criticized as too hastened by scholars and scientists, as the living conditions could not be restored in a short time. Sulfur levels, for instance, were much higher in the air than before the reconstruction process (Makkouk el-Jam, F. (2008) *Assessment of Airborne Particulate Matter Elevation in Haret Hreik (Beirut) after the Israeli Bombardment of July 2006*. MA Thesis. Beirut: American University of Beirut, p. 72).

51 Interview with Amel Association conducted in Wata al-Mossaitbeh, Beirut, 11 October 2011.

the beneficiaries for the required services when possible, to avoid sponsoring aprioristic charity. It is in this sense that he argues that ‘Amel acts to be the feet, not the head, of our own society’. Hence, the concept of guiding individuals and their approach to moral life that was present in Fadlallah-founded associations gets lost here. In this regard, Amel’s approach is comparable to that of international organizations, which generally promote themselves as a catalyzing force for existing civic dynamism, often denying the NGO political influence on society, by delegating politics to society itself. From this perspective, NGOs should only accelerate and support people’s actions and translate public ideas and intentions into real changes. In this regard, Amel’s leader<sup>52</sup> argued that his NGO’s work merely entails promoting a ‘culture of rights’ - *thaqafat al-huquq* - which, in current Lebanese society, is still highly community-oriented and community-grounded.

Reconciling the secular and the Shiite perspectives, Zahir Jalul<sup>53</sup> spoke about a culture of humankind – *thaqafat al-insan* - that is still absent in Lebanon. This needs to be connected to humanitarian acts historically recognized and ‘baptized’ by the martyrs’ blood<sup>54</sup> and the individual commitment in the Resistance. The local secular perspective on humanitarianism in the July war is also at odds with the proliferation of informal and generally small organizations that were set up by local residents - usually Dahiye’s businessmen, the newly emerged Shiite middle class. They regularly distribute clothes, furniture, and money to the vulnerable ‘for the Islamic value of doing charity, as it’s written in the Holy Koran’, as a local businessman, Hasan,<sup>55</sup> affirmed in Haret Hreik.<sup>56</sup> ‘Of course there are people that became homeless in the July war, but orphans are always around in Dahiye. You always have a reason to help, till the time these people will be able to empower themselves’ (he uses the Arabic expression: *yaksab ajar al-ma’ida*, meaning until the time one is able to ‘earn his own living’). This phenomenon gave rise to

52 Interview with Amal director and founder Kamel Mohanna conducted at the Amel Association headquarter: Mossaiytbe, Beirut, 24 October 2011.

53 Leader of the Education Committee of Borj al-Barajneh. Municipality Bulletin 2013.

54 It is also interesting to notice that the term *martius* in ancient Greek means ‘witness’, where therefore a sense of agency is totally maintained despite the suffering and the humiliation that war can cause.

55 I here mention only personal names for which explicit consent has been provided.

56 19 October 2011.

a sort of private proliferation of services, in the form of organic cultural expressions of religious obligations. After the July war - which empowered some and rendered the area more conservative and poorer in the view of others - this phenomenon saw mixed economies of *laissez-faire* inhabit the public space in an aiding-purchasing-selling chain;<sup>57</sup> and subsidies have become only for the very poor, without seeking to ensure long term sustainability.

The fact that the Lebanese state ceded welfare to the local religious domain encouraged the colonization of the public by the private.<sup>58</sup> Charity and local entrepreneurship are peacefully reconciled within Amel's action and philosophy, as conveyers of local conceptions of secular humanitarianism. However, through Hasan's universe I regard the local Shiite conception of charity as a way of spiritually 'cleansing' his privilege of being enfranchised, as an established large-scale seller and politically plugged into the local network of the Hezbollah party and provider.

*The fact that the Lebanese state ceded welfare to the local religious domain encouraged the colonization of the public by the private*

### **Conclusion**

This paper has sought to demonstrate the complex interrelation between service provision, and community belonging and social solidarity, especially during times of crisis, when community services compete to increase their funding and their international accountability. As one of my interlocutors affirmed, 'in the absence of an efficient welfare state, religious providers are more than welcome in meeting people's needs'.<sup>59</sup> From this perspective, it is mostly thanks to such providers that Dahiye, after 2006, increasingly became a separate space, self-sufficient, where the fears of erasure, displacement and marginalization, symptoms of a 'damaged identity',<sup>60</sup> disappear. Collective self-confidence in the suburbs has been emerging over the last two decades despite increasing disaffection with local providers due to the strong nexus between access to local services and political constituencies. In this vein, non-state faith-based actors in Dahiye have provided social services to strengthen the social

57 In Haret Hreik, for example, I met wholesalers that used to donate part of the items they used to purchase to the local needy, rather than selling them on the retail market.

58 Makdissi, S. (1997) 'Laying Claim to Beirut: Urban Narrative and Spatial Identity in the Age of Solidère', *Critical Inquiry*, 23 (3), pp. 664-705.

59 Interview with a secular aid worker. Beirut, October 11, 2011.

60 Khalaf, S. (2006) *Heart of Beirut: Reclaiming the Bourj*. London: Saqi Books, p. 120.

safety net that the Lebanese state has been unable to provide at a universal level.<sup>61</sup>

Yet, beyond the FBOs' different ideological nuances within the same confessional sphere, as I have illustrated, the ways in which such local FBOs impede or enhance one another's accountability and local legitimacy requires further qualitative research. In the current neoliberal humanitarian era, the intellectual effort to unpack these diverse ideologies and models of care - despite the 'sameness' of their community 'belonging' - may lead us to reevaluate the factors underlying both social solidarity and antagonism, which tend to be deterministically associated with religious beliefs in the Lebanese context. By illuminating the nuanced character of aid provision in secular, Shiite, collective, and self-started models of care in Dahiye, I argue that, while I have previously shown<sup>62</sup> that the July 2006 war exemplifies how extra-community – and therefore post-confessional – solidarity was tangible and can even grown in times of crisis, social solidarity should not necessarily and exclusively be perceived and approached as stemming from (unrealistically well-bounded and distinctively defined) religious and cultural communities.

**Note:** The people who are explicitly mentioned in this article previously provided their written consent (2011-2013 fieldwork research conducted under the University of Sydney Human Research Ethics Committee's approval no. 2012/2146).

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61 And this is a shared opinion among faith-based and secular aid providers who had worked in the July war. Confessional provision of services is in fact seen as an unavoidable reflection of Lebanese confessional society. Interview with Marie-Hélène Kassardjian from UNDP, Beirut Downtown, 24 November 2011.

62 Carpi, *Adhocratic Humanitarianisms and Ageing Emergencies in Lebanon*.